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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000333

SIPDIS

CORRECTED COPY: ADDING COMMENT AND REVISED SUMMARY
CENTCOM FOR GENERAL PETRAEUS FROM AMBASSADOR ERDMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/05/2029

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: CHARGE'S SEPTEMBER 2ND MEETING WITH SAUDI PRINCE
MOHAMMED BIN NAIF

REF: A. RIYADH 1151

[1](#)B. RIYADH 1126

[1](#)C. RIYADH 1121

[1](#)D. RIYADH 1110

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Classified By: Classified by CDA Ambassador Richard Erdman for reasons
1.4(b) and (d)

CORRECTED COPY: ADDING COMMENT AND REVISED SUMMARY

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Charge (Ambassador Erdman) met with Saudi Assistant Interior Minister Mohammed bin Naif (MbN) for nearly an hour September 2 at the prince's sprawling, palatial estate in the northern outskirts of Jeddah to convey U.S. best wishes in the wake of the unsuccessful August 28 attempt on his life. The meeting featured discussion on the implications of the attack, recent developments in Yemen (septel), and the finalization of the amendment correcting the translation of the OPM-MOI agreement, which MbN and Charge signed. At a September 3 Iftar hosted by Charge, leading think-tankers, Shura Council members, and a prominent editor all agreed that the attack, contrasting MbN's humanity with the inhumanity of the attacker, would put extremists further on the defensive and enable people to criticize extremist sentiment more openly. End summary.

APPRECIATION FOR U.S. CONCERN

[1](#)2. (C) Charge, accompanied by BPM chief, said he wanted to convey in person U.S.G. condemnation of the August 28 attack as well as best wishes and relief that the prince had been miraculously spared serious injury. While MbN may already have heard of or seen the September 1 White House statement expressing the President's concern, Charge said he wanted to share the official text as well as personal messages from DHS Secretary Napolitano and Counterterrorism Director Benjamin. MbN was quite a popular guy and had many friends in the U.S. government, Charge noted, since these messages were in addition to those received from Under Secretary Burns, General Petraeus, Treasury Secretary Geithner, and others. MbN said he deeply appreciated the concern and friendship shown to him, noting he had just finished speaking by phone to Treasury Secretary Geithner but unfortunately kept missing calls made by General Petraeus -- "my favorite general."

"GOD WAS PROTECTING ME."

¶ 13. (C) MbN then described the attack along lines reported elsewhere and showed a number of photographs taken shortly after the attack, many of them quite gruesome. "It was a miracle I survived," he said reflectively, as he looked at the blood- and flesh-splattered walls, as if reliving the moment. Pointing to the one clean area of the wall -- a halo of white surrounded by blood stains -- he said, "God was clearly protecting me." It was a sign that he had been doing the right thing and was more than ever resolved to continue his efforts against terrorism and violent extremism, combining tough measures against dangerous, unrepentant terrorists ("we shoot to kill") along with understanding and compassion for those who have been misguided, recognize the error of their ways and want to surrender. The decision to publicize the attack -- including the grim pictures, his condolence call to the family of the attacker, his cell phone conversation with the attacker's cohorts in Yemen just moments before the explosion, in which he was expressing concern about their bringing women and children safely back to the Kingdom -- would make clear to the public who was being true to the tenets of Islam and who was the real enemy of Islam.

ATTACK HAS INCREASED SUPPORT AND CREDIBILITY

¶ 14. (C) Charge said MbN had shown great courage and generosity of spirit in reaching out to the family of the attacker and expressing concern for the safe return of their families, even as the explosive device was about to be detonated. Perhaps some good would come from this cowardly attack, and many religious-minded Saudis would see his miraculous escape from serious injury as a sign of God's protection and

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blessing for their efforts to eliminate violent extremism and terrorism. Yes, MbN said, we have to "dry up" extremism. The attack, he added, will help the public understanding that it had not just been against the government but against all Saudis and their culture.

¶ 15. (C) Asked whether he had some residual trauma or had difficulty sleeping after this close and grisly brush with death, he said he was sleeping well, feeling energized because the attack had shown he was on the right path, and convinced that he now had more credibility than ever with his men. Having been at risk himself, he could more easily ask them to undertake difficult and dangerous assignments where they could be at risk. In parting -- a few minutes before 2 a.m. -- Charge pledged continued cooperation against terrorism and extremism and once more conveyed best wishes to MbN from his many friends in the U.S. The prince again expressed deep gratitude and determination to continue the Kingdom's efforts undeterred.

COMMENT

¶ 16. (C) At an intimate September 3 Iftar hosted by Charge in Jeddah for prominent think-tankers, Shura Council members, and the editor of the influential daily al-Watan (Jamal Kashoggi), there was the unanimous, cautiously hopeful sentiment that the failed attack has weakened violent extremists and strengthened the government's hand in dealing with them. The fact that the attack occurred during Ramadan, in effect desecrating the holy month, was in interlocutors' view particularly offensive for Saudis. They also felt the publicizing of the attack brought home the grim reality of terrorism. This unusual frankness in presenting the grisly photographic evidence, plus the contrast between the humanity shown by Prince Mohammed and the inhumanity demonstrated by the attacker and his cohorts, would also weaken the attraction of extremism. Worried that the attempt on the Prince's life might mark the start of a new Al Qaeda "strategy of assassination," even against persons like

himself, Kashoggi echoed MbN's own point about the incident being an attack on Saudi society, not just against the Saudi government or a member of the royal family. It was also a strike against what the Prince stood for culturally -- as a modern, U.S.-educated Saudi who saw the need for change, valued knowledge-based education, and was working to address the root cause of extremism. One Shura Council member observed that one good thing that had come out of the terrible tragedy of 9/11 was that it had been a wake-up call for Saudi Arabia about the need to act against radical Islamic extremists before it was too late. Before 9/11, it had been very difficult to criticize radical, fundamentalist Islamic beliefs. That attitude began to change after 9/11 but now, in the wake of the August 28 attack, criticism of extremist thinking would become easier. End comment.

¶7. (U) Ambassador Erdman has cleared this message.
QUINN